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LESSONS FROM ENGLISH WAR EXPERIENCE IN THE EMPLOYMENT OF LABOR

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The first effect of the war on English industry was the creation of a feeling of uncertainty. Food prices began to advance, employers in most industries doubted whether they could find a market for their output, and employment slackened in all except the war industries. By the end of August, the unemployed in those trade unions which report to the Board of Trade amounted to 7.1 per cent of their total membership, as compared to 2.8 per cent at the end of July. In the insured trades the percentage of unemployed had increased from 2.6 at the end of July to 6.2 at the end of August. These percentages, however, do not tell the whole story, since in many industries and establishments the workers were not laid off but were placed on short time. There was the prospect of much distress and government efforts were at first directed to the relief of this distress rather than to the question of the supply of labor.

This state of affairs was of short duration. The war industries began at once to prosper as government orders were placed for guns and ammunition, ships, army clothing, hosiery, saddles, bridles, harness, boots and shoes, and other military necessities. From here the prosperity spread to other trades—those supplying materials or equipment—such as the woolen, the iron and steel, and the building trades. Recovery was a little slower in other trades but the recruiting campaign soon began to show its effects in these trades in the withdrawal of men of military age, so that by the end of the year 1914 employment had reached its pre-war level in most trades, and in those which were engaged on government work a shortage of male labor had already appeared.

Since the early part of 1915 there has hardly been a problem of unemployment in Great Britain. The statistics of unemployment published in the official *Labour Gazette* show that since February, 1915, the level of unemployment has been less than one per cent, a level lower than that reached at any time since such figures began to be gathered.

On the other hand, the problem of how to secure sufficient labor to supply war needs and at the same time enable the constantly

growing demand for fighting men to be met has required for its solution the best efforts of those persons mainly responsible for the conduct of the war. It is the purpose of this paper to show the chief means by which this problem has found a solution.

When the war is over and a review of the means by which victory was secured is possible, I venture to say that there is no piece of pre-war administrative machinery for which Great Britain will be more grateful than for her system of Labor (Employment) Exchanges. Established by act of 1909, the first exchanges were not opened until February, 1910, when 61 were placed in operation. By the middle of July, 1914, 407 exchanges had been opened and around 400 the number has remained ever since. Although by no means the first country to establish public employment bureaus, no other country has had such an extensive and well consolidated system; and while the administration of these exchanges has not been free from criticism, especially by organized labor, the government has placed an ever-increasing reliance upon them as a means of mobilizing its labor forces during the war, and now proposes to quadruple the number of exchanges in existence.

When recruiting began in Great Britain, and for some time thereafter, no restrictions were placed by the government upon voluntary enlistments of skilled laborers in any trade. The result was that by the spring of 1915 the shortage of skilled labor was painfully felt in those trades like engineering, shipbuilding, and coal mining, upon which the government was most dependent for the conduct of the war. Even without the recruiting campaign, this shortage would have soon made itself felt because of the increased demands made upon these trades. As soon as the mistake was recognized, the government took steps to prevent further enlistments from these trades and even withdrew from the army and replaced in industry many skilled workers who had enlisted. These withdrawals were difficult to make, however, for many of these workers because of their superior training and intelligence had been made non-commissioned officers, and the military authorities naturally offered much opposition to their withdrawal from the army.

The first effort to supply the growing deficiency of skilled labor in the munitions trades was by the transfer of skilled workers from other trades. Most of these transfers in the early months of the war doubtless took place in the usual manner, i.e., by employees voluntarily leaving one place of employment and going to another

place or establishment where employment was more regular and there was the possibility of greater earnings. Many of them, however, took place through the Labor Exchanges and were directly promoted by them. Thus, while in the year 1913 out of a total of nearly 922,000 placements made by the exchanges only 111,000, or 12.4 per cent, were in exchange districts outside those in which the applicants were registered, in 1914, 177,000, or 15.8 per cent, of the total placements were in outside districts; and the statement is made that "the increase is mainly accounted for by the transference during the last six months of the year, i.e., during the war period." In 1915, 21.6 per cent of the total placements by the exchanges were made in outside districts, and the average distance traveled was much greater than in the preceding year. Most of the transfers through exchanges were made in direct response to military requirements. In 1915, of the 196,000 men transferred, over 140,000 went to work in the building of military huts, munition factories, and public works, or were employed directly in the munitions trades.

The government in June, 1915, took measures to promote these transfers by an appeal to the patriotism of the workers. Acting in coöperation with the trade unions, the Ministry of Munitions invited "all skilled workers in the engineering, shipbuilding and allied trades not already engaged on war contracts to register themselves for such service at munitions bureaus opened for this purpose at Labor Exchanges and elsewhere throughout the United Kingdom." Registration rendered a man liable to be transferred to any place in which his work was needed by the government, without any reduction of wages, and special allowances were to be made him to cover the cost of his transfer for living expenses while away from home. These men were to be known as War Munitions Volunteers and were to receive and wear special badges which would protect them against insistent appeals for enlistments. Between June 24 and July 10, 1915, about 90,000 volunteers had enrolled for this service.

It was not long, however, before the authorities discovered that such a thing as excessive mobility of labor was possible. The chaotic condition in which many industries were thrown by the withdrawal of labor at the very time that they were receiving government contracts was causing employers to bid against one another and against the government for whatever skilled labor was obtainable, and laborers in large numbers were moving hither and thither attracted by the promise of higher wages.

At first the government sought to prevent this excessive migration by an Order in Council, dated April 29, 1915, which forbade employers in factories engaged in munitions work to advertise or otherwise seek to induce persons employed in other factories on government work to leave their places of employment to take work in the establishment of the soliciting employer. The order failed to accomplish its purpose, for it did not prevent a laborer from voluntarily leaving his place of employment, nor did it provide any means by which accusations of enticing laborers could be proved.

By certain sections in the Munitions of War acts, 1915 and 1916, therefore, the government sought to deal with this matter. Employers were forbidden to give employment to a workman who had been employed on, or in connection with, munitions work within a period of six weeks preceding his application for work, unless the workman was in possession of a "leaving certificate" from the employer by whom he was last so employed or from a munitions tribunal set up under the act, and which was empowered to act in cases the employer had refused such certificate and the munitions tribunal felt that such refusal was unreasonable.

More dissatisfaction grew out of the operation of this section of the Munitions Act than from any other part of that famous piece of legislation, and the British Government's Commission on Industrial Unrest, in its report made last July, places this second on its list of the causes of industrial unrest in the United Kingdom. Workmen felt that their freedom to select their place of work had been unreasonably restricted, and that employers and their foremen took advantage of the situation to make work hard and to refuse leaving certificates even when they might legitimately have been granted. Workmen also complained that they were often prevented from going to work in establishments where wages were better and that the munitions tribunals did not take this into consideration in regulating the wages of the establishments to which the men were restricted. So great was the dissatisfaction with the leaving-certificate plan that, even before the report of the commission was made, the government had decided to repeal these provisions of the Munitions of War acts. This has since been done (the abolition dating from the 15th of October last), and an employee on munitions work is now free to leave his present employment *for other war work* on giving his employer a week's notice or such longer notice as is provided by his existing contract.

To prevent excessive migration of labor the War Munitions Volunteer scheme has been extended to all men eligible to enroll, and all men having dependents will receive subsistence allowances while away from home and free railway passage to and from their homes on general and trade holidays. The Trade Union Advisory Committee has appealed to workmen not to change their employment "without definite and substantial grounds and to show that the output of munitions will not suffer from the abolition of the leaving certificates."

The other great effort made by the British government to recruit labor for war industries has been the adoption of the policy known as "dilution of labor." As stated by the government, the dilution of labor implies that: (1) "The employment of skilled men should be confined to work which cannot be efficiently performed by less skilled labour or by women. (2) Women should be employed as far as practicable on all classes of work for which they are suitable. (3) Semi-skilled and unskilled men should be employed on any work which does not necessitate the employment of skilled men and for which women are unsuitable."

Since men of military age and fit for service have been needed in the army, and unskilled men could be better spared for this service than skilled workers, it may be said that no great supply of unskilled male labor has been uncovered by the adoption of this policy. In practice, therefore, the policy of dilution of labor has largely resolved itself into the effort to introduce women into industry to supply the growing needs of munitions and other war industries. "There is one source and one only," said a Board of Trade appeal to the manufacturers, sent out in March, 1916, "from which the shortage (of labor in the manufacturing industries) can be made good; that is, the great body of women who are at present unoccupied or engaged only in work not of an essential character."

Governmental efforts to recruit women for industrial purposes have been largely made with the manufacturing industries, more particularly those manufacturing munitions, in mind. They have been largely aided in this work by the desire of women themselves to engage in munitions work, a desire which had its origin in the patriotic impulse to serve their country in the time of need, and which has been sustained not only by patriotism but by the high earnings which have accrued to the women by manufacturing munitions on the piece-rate plan.

Such opposition as has been encountered to this method of diluting labor has come, not from the women workers, but from the men. Foreseeing these objections, the government took steps in March, 1915, to secure the consent of the representatives of the leading trade unions to the introduction of its policy of dilution.

An amendment to the Defence of the Realm Acts was adopted, which authorized the military and naval authorities to require that factories where work for military or naval service could be carried on be placed at their disposal and that work in such establishments be carried on under the direction of the Minister of Munitions. Armed with this persuasive instrument, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Lloyd-George) and the Chairman of the Board of Trade (Mr. Runciman) held a conference with representatives of the principal trade unions on the day following the adoption of the amendment. As a result of this conference, the famous Treasury Agreement was reached. By this agreement the trade unions (through their representatives) agreed to relax their trade-union practices and customs which would have hindered the carrying out of the policy of dilution and which had the effect of regulating and restricting output. Employers in government factories and in establishments controlled by the government might introduce female labor and unskilled male labor to do work which had hitherto been done by unskilled male labor.

The government, on its part, promised that at the end of the war the trade-union rules and practices prevailing at the beginning of the war should be restored; that a record would be kept of the nature of departures from practices prevailing at the time of the agreement; and that employers would restore to their old positions, or to others most nearly resembling them, skilled workers who had withdrawn from industry to join the fighting forces. It also was agreed that the semi-skilled laborers substituted for the skilled workers should be paid at the usual rates of pay for their district. The government also promised that profits of employers engaged in the production of munitions should be definitely limited. The government proceeded at once to keep its part of the agreement by the passage of the Munitions of War Act, 1915, which imposed upon employers in controlled establishments the conditions of the Treasury Agreement and limited profits in these establishments by requiring that 80 per cent of the profits in excess of those earned in peace times should be paid into the Treasury. The government then proceeded to conduct an active

campaign to increase the employment of women in every branch of industry on which the government relied for war supplies. Not only the Labor Exchanges, but the factory inspectors and other government officials, were called upon to assist employers in this work. Conferences composed of employers in various establishments and of government officials were called to discuss the means and extent of dilution possible in these establishments. The Board of Trade issued an appeal, "on behalf of the government, to every employer who is finding his business threatened with diminished productivity through the loss of men, not to accept such diminution as an inevitable consequence of the war, but to make every possible effort to maintain his production by using women, whether in direct substitution for the men who have been withdrawn or by some subdivision or rearrangement of his work."

The increased employment of women in Great Britain during the war has already passed through several fairly distinct stages. At first it took place in those industries, like clothing and the textiles, in which women had already been largely employed before the war, and in commercial occupations and the public service where the work was not beyond a woman's strength and where only a short period of training was necessary for such work as women were called upon to do. This extension of woman's employment, while very considerable, has not required government assistance in any considerable degree to bring it about, although it has had government encouragement wherever such employment of women would have the effect of relieving men for military service or for industrial tasks connected with the prosecution of the war. Government estimates indicate that about 496,000 women were employed in commercial occupations in July, 1914. Three years later, in July, 1917, 324,000 had been added to this number, making a total of 820,000. In banking and finance only 9,500 women were employed in July, 1914. By July, 1917, this number had grown to 54,000, an increase of 570 per cent. In the civil service 66,000 women were to be found in July, 1914, while in July, 1917, there were 98,000 women so employed.

The second stage in the employment of women was reached when women began to be employed in considerable numbers in the metal trades, in the manufacture of munitions. This stage was hardly reached until February, 1915. In July of that year Mr. Lloyd-George said that about 50,000 women were employed in the munitions branch of the metal trades. A large number of

these employees had been transferred from other branches of the metal trades, as such transfers are comparatively easy to effect. During the first year of the war women were chiefly employed "on repetition work and automatic machinery, involving little or no departure from the work to which they are ordinarily accustomed." These women were not, in many instances, directly replacing men, but they were doing what before the war had been regarded as men's work. The enormous output of shells and other products of the munitions establishments had permitted standardization of products and a high degree of division of labor, so that very little training was necessary to enable a woman to do the work required.

The third stage in the employment of women was reached when an effort was made to substitute them for men in the performance of work which required some skill. Some training is required for this work and this training the government has undertaken to supply, without charge, through the technical schools. The training is not intended to be thorough, but is just sufficient to enable the learners to acquire the proficiency necessary to perform the work under the supervision of skilled men. The Ministry of Munitions has announced that it is "not prepared to sanction any course which provides less than 30 or more than 100 hours' instruction," and it has suggested that arrangements be made so that no course shall last more than a month.

The net result of all these efforts to introduce more women into industry during war time is that at the end of three years of war it was estimated that 1,382,000 women had entered some wage-earning occupation other than domestic service since July, 1914, in addition to the 3,298,000 already employed. In some establishments the employers have fewer workers than before the war but have more women employed than formerly, having substituted women for men in certain branches of the trade.

The sources of supply from which these women workers have come are many. Something like 400,000, it is estimated, have come from domestic service and small shops. Others are married women who have felt some compulsion to resume their places in industry since their husbands, the breadwinners of the family, have gone to the front. "The munitions workers of today," says a memorandum of the Health of Munitions Workers Committee, "include dressmakers, laundry workers, textile workers, domestic servants, clerical workers, shop assistants, university and art students, women and girls of every social grade and of no previous

wage-earning experience, also in large numbers wives and widows of soldiers, many married women who had retired altogether from industrial life, and many again who had never entered it."

Many of these women have had to be transferred from their homes in all parts of the United Kingdom to the munitions centers, and these transfers have for the most part been made through the Labor Exchanges. Thirty-three thousand women workers were transferred by the Exchanges from one district to another in 1914; in 1915 the number so transferred was 53,000, and in 1916, 160,000. Special campaigns have been conducted to persuade unoccupied women in non-industrial areas to leave their homes for this work. Mention is made by the *Labour Gazette* of one instance where 772 women from places as far separated as Aberdeen and Penzance were brought together in one factory in the West Midlands.

This mobility of female labor has, of course, been attended with great difficulties and some dangers. In many munitions centers, the housing facilities were insufficient to care for the increase in the number of workers and houses have had to be provided. How far the government has fallen short in its efforts to solve the housing problem is known to all readers of the reports on Industrial Unrest, but the failures seem to be more noticeable in the case of family houses than in the case of single women. The fact that the transference of women workers to places, oftentimes many miles from their homes, would present grave problems relating to the morals and health of the workers was appreciated by the authorities; and special arrangements have been made in the way of welfare work within and without the factories for women workers, including the appointment of forewomen nurses and women supervisors.

Efforts to stimulate production led the government in the early part of the war to relax, and in some cases to suspend, the factory acts which had been slowly built up by the experience of a century for the protection of women and children against the overstrain of industry. How far these relaxations proved a failure, not only from the standpoint of the women themselves but from that of the employer and the government, which was aiming at maximum productivity, is well known to many of you and is a subject which can not be dealt with here. It is sufficient to say that the old restrictions have had in many cases to be re-introduced and during the last two years the government has given increased attention to the relation between hours of labor and productivity.

Summarizing, very briefly, the lessons which English experience in the employment of labor during the war has provided for our guidance, we may say that the following seem to be established facts:

1. Any country possesses in its industrially unemployed women a vast reserve of productive power on which it can call in times of emergency, and which has a mobility hitherto unsuspected.

2. For the utilization of such labor there is no limit, except that set by the physical capacity of the worker and the extent of her training. Considering the length of time which most women are likely to remain in industry, only a brief and intensive training seems desirable from their standpoint; and this training will suffice in those industries where production of standardized products on a large scale has led to a high degree of division of labor.

3. The effective utilization of women's labor requires the government and private employers to give unusual consideration to problems relating to the health and fatigue of the workers, lest the effort to secure maximum productivity overreach itself. Overtime finds its inevitable correction in broken time.

4. Any burdensome restriction which has the effect of creating widespread dissatisfaction among the workers will lead to a decline, rather than to an increase, in productivity. In general, among peoples trained in the habits of self-government, governmental efforts to secure the coöperation of organization of employers and of employees will win better results than will measures of compulsion.

5. For the effective mobilization of its labor forces and their disposal in those industries and establishments where they are most needed, a well integrated system of employment bureaus is essential, and employers should be encouraged to rely upon these bureaus to secure the extra labor required to operate their plants.

6. The need of men for military service should not be allowed to outweigh the need of men for the production of those things upon which military success is dependent. Skilled laborers in the industries on which the government relies for its military supplies should not be drafted or allowed to enlist until the government has satisfied itself that satisfactory substitutes are available. What Lloyd-George said to the Trade-Union Congress meeting at Bristol in 1915 is still applicable, viz., that "this is a war of materials" and that it "has resolved itself into a conflict between the mechanics of Germany and Austria on the one hand, and the

mechanics of Great Britain and France (to whom we may now add the United States) on the other.”

If this be true, it is obvious that everything which tends to conserve our industrial efficiency is as important as a means to the end—the winning of the war—as that which promotes military efficiency.